

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 1, 2019

The Honorable Mike Quigley
Chairman, Subcommittee on Financial
Services and General Government
House Committee on Appropriations
H-307, the Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Graves
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Financial
Services and General Government
House Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Quigley and Ranking Member Graves:

We respectfully write to request that the fiscal year 2020 (FY20) Financial Services and General Government Appropriations bill and accompanying report exclude any language that would prohibit the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) from creating pre-filled forms or software.

As you know, recent appropriations laws included bill language that restricted the discretion and authority of the Secretary of the Treasury and the IRS to address this matter. For these reasons, we respectfully oppose the inclusion of any provision that is similar in intent or impact to what was included in Division D, Title I, Section 111 of Public Law (Pub. L.) 116-6 or in Pub. L. 115-141, Division E, Title I, Section 112.

We believe that this language prevents the IRS from reviewing, managing, and developing diverse options to assist taxpayers. In particular, we believe that this provision conflicts with and undermines the intention of H.R. 1957, the Taxpayer First Act, which recently passed the House by voice vote. The Taxpayer First Act is the result of many public hearings and roundtables to modernize this long-overlooked agency. This negotiated, bipartisan, bicameral compromise provides desperately needed guidance and authority for the IRS, with a particular focus on low-income taxpayers and working families.

Unfortunately, this appropriations language undercuts the intent of the Taxpayer First Act authors to retain and bolster options to simplify the taxpayer experience. H.R. 1957 strives to ensure that the IRS has the flexibility to develop and explore alternative taxpayer preparation and service programs that respond to current needs and challenges.

We believe that any appropriations policy rider would undermine the spirit and purpose of this bipartisan and long-overdue legislation. For example, the Taxpayer First Act authorizes the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance and Free File program as options for taxpayers seeking assistance. The IRS chief counsel recently reconfirmed that the agency may suspend the Free File program with 12-months advance notice; however, restrictive appropriations language would prevent the IRS from using its discretion to respond to current needs and taxpayers' preferences.

The IRS must be able to respond to existing priorities and emerging threats. Similar to many of our colleagues, we remain alarmed about the steady decline in taxpayer service that stems from IRS budget cuts, retirements of experienced employees, and a lack of quality

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training. Continued budget and staffing cuts result in taxpayers experiencing longer telephone wait times and decreased levels of service when they attempt to secure assistance and guidance from the IRS. While the Taxpayer First Act is a critical component to addressing many long-standing challenges in taxpayer service, restoring federal funding for the IRS is a critical component of improving the taxpayer experience.

Increased and sustained funding will help the IRS implement the Taxpayer First Act's comprehensive customer service strategy, expansion of the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program, improved cybersecurity, and protection from identity and refund theft and fraud. It is critical that the appropriations bill provide adequate support for these programs and Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE), Low-Income Taxpayer Clinics (LITC), and the Taxpayer Advocate Service.

In addition, we respectfully reiterate our request that the FY20 bill refrain from encouraging or supporting the troubling private collection agencies (PCAs) program. The Taxpayer First Act severely limits the scope of the program in which the National Taxpayer Advocate and Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration found disturbing patterns of harassment and abuse of low-income taxpayers. We hope that the appropriators will not encourage an expansion of this problematic initiative.

Finally, we hope that the Committee will be mindful of House Rule XXI that prohibits revenue and tax administration provisions in appropriations bills. We remain strongly opposed to any appropriations legislation that includes provisions "affecting" tax administration without any Congressional review or public discussion.

As always, we thank you for considering our views and for your hard work and leadership on the annual Financial Services and General Government Appropriations bill.

Sincerely,



Member of Congress



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FY20 Appropriations Letter Cosigners

1. The Honorable Katie Hill
1. The Honorable Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
2. The Honorable John Lewis
3. The Honorable Chris Pappas
4. The Honorable Mark Takano
5. The Honorable Thomas R. Suozzi
6. The Honorable Brendan F. Boyle
7. The Honorable Mike Levin
8. The Honorable Judy Chu
9. The Honorable Linda T. Sánchez
10. The Honorable Gwen Moore
11. The Honorable Peter A. DeFazio